

## Side 1- Racial Terror Lynchings in America

Thousands of African American men, women, and children were the victims of lynching and racial terror violence in the United States in the century following the end of the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> As the federal protection of the Reconstruction era ended, African Americans seeking equal rights suffered violent abuse and resistance from white supremacists, leading to decades of political, social and economic exploitation.<sup>2</sup> Jim Crow laws and threats of violence were used not only to deny African Americans their rights, but also to punish those who disobeyed the racial hierarchy.<sup>3</sup> Lynchings became the most public and notorious form of racial terrorism, intended to intimidate African Americans and enforce racial segregation.<sup>4</sup> These lynchings took place across the country and were perpetrated by people with no connection to one another, yet these rituals often included many of the same elements including abductions by a large mob (often from police custody), returning the victim to the scene of the alleged crime, stripping the victim to further inflict humiliation, and torture or mutilation.<sup>5</sup> Many of the names of lynching victims were not recorded and remain unknown, but over 200 documented lynchings took place in Tennessee alone, at least six having taken place in Davidson County.<sup>6</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> See *Chicago Tribune* annual lynching tallies 1882-1968; “Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror (Third Edition),” Equal Justice Initiative, <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>.
  - <sup>2</sup> Shawn Leigh Alexander, ed., *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2015), 12-16; Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America’s Most Progressive Era* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 287; Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings* (New York: Humanity Books, 2002), 39; Sherrilyn A. Ifill, *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-First Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 58.
  - <sup>3</sup> Christopher Waldrep, ed., *Lynching in America: A History in Documents* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 99; Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 44; Manfred Berg, *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 92.
  - <sup>4</sup> Arthur F. Raper, *Mass Violence in America: The Tragedy of Lynching* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 1; Manfred Berg, *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 90; Michael J. Pfeifer, *The Roots of Rough Justice: Origins of American Lynching* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press 2011), 82
  - <sup>5</sup> Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), vii; Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 136; Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 21; James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 1.
  - <sup>6</sup> EJI, “Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror; see Metropolitan Historical Commission records.

## Side 2- Lynching of Samuel Smith

The last known or recorded lynching in Davidson County took place in 1924 near this site.<sup>7</sup> Around midnight on December 14, 1924, a mob of at least six armed, white, masked men entered Nashville General Hospital and abducted Samuel Smith, age 15.<sup>8</sup> The men quickly identified Smith, who was in police custody and chained to his bed.<sup>9</sup> Nurse Amy Weagle attempted to hide the chain in an effort to thwart the abduction.<sup>10</sup> In the early hours of December 15, the mob drove Smith to Frank Hill Road, now Old Burkett Road, near the site of the alleged robbery and shooting that led to his arrest.<sup>11</sup> The mob stripped Smith of his pajamas, hung him from a tree with a thin rope, and shot him multiple times.<sup>12</sup> Despite a grand jury investigation, public outcry and a reward offer in local newspapers, no one was ever arrested, charged or held accountable for the murder of Samuel Smith.<sup>13</sup> This act of racial terror was meant not only to punish Smith for his alleged crimes, but to intimidate the local African American community and reinforce the racial hierarchy through violence.<sup>14</sup> Though passed down for generations in the community, this story has now been spoken of openly in an effort toward reconciliation.

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<sup>7</sup> EJI, “Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror; “Mob Lynches Young Negro,” *Nashville Banner*, page 1, 11, December 16, 1924.

<sup>8</sup> “Mob Lynches Young Negro,” *Nashville Banner*, page 11, December 16, 1924; “Mob Lynches Negro Boy Who Shot Grocer,” *Nashville Tennessean*, December 16, page 1, 1924; Grand Jury Investigation, Amy Weagle, 1925.

<sup>9</sup> Grand Jury Investigation, Amy Weagle.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; Grand Jury Investigation, Arthur Hayes, 1925.

<sup>11</sup> “Negro Accused of Shooting Caught,” *Nashville Banner*, December 13, 1924.

<sup>12</sup> *Nashville Banner*, page 11.; *Nashville Tennessean*, page 1; Grand Jury Investigation, Bob Briley, 1925; Grand Jury Investigation, Ed Harris, 1925; Grand Jury Investigation, J.G. Gennett, 1925.

<sup>13</sup> “State Moves Against Mob.” *Nashville Banner*, page 1, December 17, 1924; “\$5,000 Reward For Arrest of Mob Offered,” *Nashville Tennessean*, page 1, December 17, 1924; “Lawyers Employed to Prosecute Mob.” *Nashville Banner*, page 1, December 19, 1924; “Next Grand Jury to Prove Lynching.” *Nashville Banner*, page 10, December 31, 1924; “DeBow Instructs Jury on Lynching,” *Nashville Banner*, page 1, January 6, 1925. “The Law’s Delay,” *Johnson City Staff-News*, page 4, February 3, 1925.

<sup>14</sup> See footnotes for Side 1 text.

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